

Merrimack hires lawyer for pipeline guidance

Proposal:

Project would be constructed by the Tennessee Gas Pipeline Co. and would include 4.49 miles and affect about 60 landowners.

By **KIMBERLY HOUGHTON**

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MERRIMACK — Town officials have hired an environmental attorney to provide guidance about the proposed pipeline that could impact local property owners.

Nancy Harrington, town council chairman, said the town has retained attorney Joanna Tourangeau from Drummond Woodsum Attorneys At Law. Tourangeau has about 15 years of experience offering environmental and natural resource legal services.

"We have in fact hired her to help guide us through this process," said Harrington. "I feel much more comfortable that we have someone backing us up, keeping an eye on us."

She said it is important for every entity involved to be well informed in order to make smart, deliberate decisions, and that all of the pros and cons are reviewed extensively. Town officials, including representatives from the local conservation commission, fire department, water district and other groups, met with Tourangeau on Wednesday.

One of the items discussed was a letter recently received from Kinder Morgan seeking permission to survey four town parcels that may lie in the path of the pipeline.

"We are not going to do anything, in terms of responding, until we get guidance from her," Harrington said of the attorney, explaining there was no immediate action permitting Kinder Morgan to survey the four properties.

Meanwhile, town officials are still waiting for Kinder Morgan to publicly meet with the council to discuss the pipeline project. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel said she expects that meeting to take place in March, according to a recent conversation she had with a representative from the organization.

Harrington said it is critical for every abutter to be aware of the pipeline, adding the town has created its own list of homeowners residing on either side of the proposed corridor. Town

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officials have asked Kinder Morgan for a copy of its list of abutters to make sure their document coincides with the town's list.

Merrimack Citizens for Pipeline Information was recently formed to address local concerns about the pipeline, and

the group spent last weekend handing out informational fliers at the local transfer station.

Merrimack is one of 17 communities in New Hampshire that is in the path of Kinder Morgan's proposed 36-inch pipeline through the southern portion of the state.

The newly preferred option for the Northeast Energy Direct Route project that would span about 80 miles across the state and be constructed by the Tennessee Gas Pipeline Co. would include 4.49 miles and affect about 60 landowners in Merrimack — if approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

The proposed route travels along Merrimack's Horse Hill Nature Preserve and the Anheuser-Busch brewery along the Daniel Webster Highway, following areas already under current public service powerlines.

"We have a responsibility to examine all aspects of this project, including current and future demand for natural gas, total costs that would be absorbed by towns and electric ratepayers and potential alternatives," Debra Huffman, member of the Merrimack Citizens for Pipeline Information, said previously.

Richard Wheatley, director of corporate communications for Kinder Morgan, said earlier that there will be many opportunities for the public to provide input about the project as the permitting process unfolds. He said it is Kinder Morgan's goal to be as transparent and candid as possible with the public.

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